

A Note on the Rigvedic Verse “Rv-7.95,2” addressed to river Saraswati

VR Patil (vrpmet@yahoo.com)

Mandala-7 of **Rigved** contains the story of the “**War of Ten Kings**” that has been enigmatically described in the three of its **104** hymns (refer to **Rv-7.18**; **Rv-7.33**; and **Rv-7.83**), and the glorification of river **Saraswati** in the two devoted hymns (see **Rv-7.95** and **Rv-7.96**). Hence these two special features make the Mandala very interesting to study again and again.

There are many persons in India and abroad who often question the very existence of river **Saraswati** and **her** geographical location. But in the present note, we shall restrict our discussion on a verse selected from the hymn **Rv-7.95** dedicated to **Saraswati** wherein the Poet has brought out the **pre-Rigvedic condition** of the most celebrated river of Vedic People.

Rv-7.95,2: *ekācetat sarasvatī nadīnām śucīryatī ghiribhya ā samudrāt /
rāyaścetantī bhuvanasya bhūrerghṛtaṃ payo duduhe nāhusāya //*

Pure in her course from mountains to the ocean, **alone** of streams **Saraswati** hath listened.

Thinking of wealth and the great world of creatures, she poured for **Nahusa** her milk and fatness.

Here our main interest in understanding the context of application of the key words- **Alone**, **Pure**, and **Nahusa/Nahusha** that are noticed in the **Griffith Translated verse [1]**.

Alone:

The Poet has used the word **Alone/eka/ekā** to hint at that among the several rivers of the **eastern region** of **Rigvedic Territory**, **Saraswati alone** completes **her** course from the **mountain to sea**. In other words, other major rivers of the eastern area like **Sutudri (Sutlej)**, **Vipas (Beas)**, **Parushni (Ravi)**, **Asikni (Chinab)** and **Vitasta (Jhelum)** are not lucky enough to meet the sea **directly**, as one by one, first they get merged with each other and then join the western river **Sindhu** in the form of two separate streams but at different locations.

Please note that in the first line of original Sanskrit verse, probably to avoid confusion, but to indicate the character **sea**, instead of word **Sindhu** (this Sanskrit word has several meanings including, a river/stream, a very large/infinite water body like lake, sea or ocean, proper name of river **Sindhu**), the Poet has specifically included the term **समुद्र/ Samudra** in it. Hence it is clear here that the word **Samudra** unambiguously means **Sea** only. Satellite imagery has traced the ancient path of river **Saraswati** from **Shivalik Hills** to **Rann of Kutch**.

Additionally, in the verse **Rv-7.95,2** when the Poet speaks about the travel of **Saraswati** from **Mountain to Sea** means, he has fairly good idea about **her** origin (**mountain**) and **her** last destination (**sea**) as well. Hence it can be said that the Composer describes river **Saraswati** as an **independent** and **continuously flowing stream** or as good as perennial **Ancient River**.

Pure:

Pure/Shuchi/ śuci is another word found in the said verse that needs explanation. In all probabilities, it manifests that, right from **her** origin to the end point, **Saraswati** flowed **within the Rigvedic Territory** and has no connection with the foreign land and/or did not depend on any foreign origin stream for the supply of water. It means to say that during the **pre-Rigvedic** time, **her integrity to Vedic People** remained beyond doubt or unquestionable. Therefore, the Poet has specifically termed her- **Pure/Shuchi** or **indigenous** in the said verse.

Nahusa/Nahusha:

As far as the term **Nahusha/Nahusa** is concerned, it is the name of the king who was the descendant of Royal Queen **Ila**, but lived during the **pre-Rigvedic time**, and ruled his kingdom from the town located on the bank of river **Saraswati**. The Poet in the above verse has made it clear that during the early part of **Nahusha's** regime, as there was no rain deficiency (please refer to verse **Rv-6.49,7** for the designation of river **Saraswati** as **Paviravi Kanya** or the **child of Lightning** which clearly indicates the rain dependency of river), **Saraswati** used to complete her natural journey from **origin to Ocean**. Subsequently, when **Saraswati** came under the influence of demon **Vritra** (personification of Drought), then the ancestors of Rigvedic Poets introduced a new warrior god **Indra** to slay **Vritra**. But the entry of **Indra** in the Vedic world was strongly opposed by **Nahusha** as he had full faith in **Seven Adityas** and explanation for the same is given below.

Nahusha as the best Warrior and the Strong Opponent of Indra

Following verse is taken from the hymn dedicated to **Indra**, wherein we find the terms **Nahusa** (term appears **twice** in original **Sanskrit verse**), along with **Turvasa** and **Yadu**.

Rv-10.49,8: अहं सप्तहा नहुषो नहुष्टरः पराश्राव यं शवसातुर्वशं यदुम ।

अहं नयन्यं सहसा सहस करं नवब्राधतो नवतिं च वक्षयम ॥

*aham saptahā nahuṣo nahuṣtarah prāśrāva yaṃ śavasāturvaśaṃ yadam /
aham nyanyaṃ sahasā sahas karam navavrādhato navatiṃ ca vakṣayam //*

Stronger am I than **Nahusa**, I who slew the **seven**: I glorified with might **Yadu** and **Turvasa**.

I brought another low, with strength I bent his strength: I let the mighty **nine-and-ninety** wax in power.

In the aforementioned **Last Mandala** verse, the Poet has compared valour and strength of **Indra** with the ancient king **Nahusa/ Nahusha**, but then claims that now God **Indra** is much stronger than earlier **Nahusa** and hence he could kill **seven** at a time. Additionally, on behalf of **Indra**, Poet states that due to blessings of **Indra**, now **Yadu** and **Turvasa** have become very powerful and famous in the world. It indirectly means **Turvasa** and **Yadu** the **two among** the famous **Five Tribes of Rigved**, now attend **Yajna** and also praise **Indra**. Presence of the name of king **Nahusha** as the **standard of comparison** to judge the heroic power of a warrior in the hymn devoted to **Indra** hints at the Poet's treatment to **Nahusha** as the **competitor** of god **Indra**. This hostility would have arisen during the **pre-Rigvedic** time when the **pre-Rigvedic Rishis** fashioned **Indra** to smite **Vritra (personification of drought)** but failed to convince the king **Nahusha** that the inclusion of new warrior god **Indra** in the **Vedic Philosophy** of that time would not bring down the status of **Seven Adityas/older Gods**. The content of the verse **Rv-8.96,16** taken from the hymn devoted to **Indra** provides a clue for the same.

Rv-8,96,16: *tvaṃ ha tyat saptabhyo jāyamāno. aśatrubhyo abhavaḥ śatnurindra |
ghūlḥe dyāvāprthivī anvavindo vibhumadbhyo bhuvanebhyo raṇaṃ dhāḥ //*

Then, **at thy birth**, thou wast the foeman, **Indra**, of those the **seven who never had met a rival**.

The hidden Pair, the Heaven and Earth, thou foundest, and to the mighty worlds thou gavest pleasure.

In the verse **Rv-8.96,16**; the Poet has mentioned that earlier to **arrival of Indra** in the Vedic world, "**Seven had no competitor**". Here a fresh question arises; "**other than Seven Adityas** that were fashioned a long before **Indra**, who could be the **seven characters** or the **Divine Beings** in the mind of the Poet?" It means to say that a newly inducted God **Indra** was seen by some members of the Vedic Society of that era as **the threat to Seven Adityas**. Similar feature is noticed in the hymn **Rv-4.18** that gives detail account of the **birth of Indra**. Poet of the said hymn in the verse **Rv-4.18,11** hints at the dispute within the Vedic Community when he mentions that after birth of **Indra**, his mother tells him "**Old Gods have deserted You, my son Indra**". It indirectly means when **Indra** was shaped, at that time, a section of the society, most likely the Ruling Class headed by king **Nahusha** strongly opposed **his** induction as the **Supreme and true Warrior God**. Probably, king **Nahusha** felt that with the entry of the new

warrior god Indra in the Vedic world, his position as the **best warrior** of his time in the society would be under threat. Hence he did not agree with the **pre-Rigvedic Rishis** about the creation of **Indra** and asked them to leave his country immediately and go some where.

Special Observation

In **Mandala -7**, apart from the two dedicated hymns i.e. **Rv-7.95** and **96** but excluding of **Apri Sukta** hymn **Rv-7.2**; **Saraswati** has also been mentioned in the verses- **Rv-7.9,5**; **Rv-7.35,11**; **Rv-7.36,6**; **Rv-7.39,5** and **Rv-7.40.3**.

In addition to river **Saraswati**; eastern rivers like **Parushni** has her presence in the two verses **Rv-7.18,8** and **9** and river **Yamuna** in the verse **Rv-7.18,19** of the famous **War hymn**.

It means to say that, in **Mandala-7**, there is no mention of any western region river.

Note: Although **Nahusha** has no direct role **during Rigvedic period**, probably his actions **prior to** beginning of **Rigvedic era** would have caused heartburns to the ancestors of Rigvedic Priests, when **He** firmly rejected **Indra**, the character shaped up by the Sages (headed by **Angirasa** and **Bhrigu**) of his time, and most likely when **Nahusa's** country (**Sapta-Sindhu** region) was reeling under the severe **Drought (Vritra effect)**.

The Poet in the verse **Rv-10.49,8** has presented **Nahusa** in the **flashback**, but **Yadu** and **Turvasa**, the **two** leaders among the **Five Tribes** or **Nahusa's People/Tribes** as the persons having full faith in **Indra**. It implies that now these members of the **Five Tribes** do not have ill feeling about God **Indra**. During the time of composition of **Mandala-8**, **Druhyus** would have migrated to west Asia (*Mitanni*) and **Anus** moved to ancient **Persia** with the section of the Priests (**Bhrigus**) but after the split in Priestly Community (see hymn **Rv-8.96**). In the **legends** composed subsequently, king **Nahusha** takes the position of God **Indra** after **the latter** leaves **his throne**. It means to say that since **pre-Rigvedic era**, in literature, king **Nahusa** and **Indra** have been portrayed as the **rivals**.

Summing up the discussion, use of the special words like **Alone**, **Pure** and **Nahusha** by the Poet of the hymn **Rv-7.95** in the **verse-2** manifests that during the era of king **Nahusha**, **Saraswati** was definitely ever flowing river who used to complete **her full course** from the **mountain/point of origin** to **sea** as there was no rain deficiency at that time. Among the several major rivers of the eastern region, **she alone** used to travel all the way to meet the **Sea** carrying **pure rain water** fallen from the sky in the **Rigvedic Territory** in her channel.

References:

1. "Rig Veda" (Bilingual), Translated by Ralph T. H. Griffith (1896) in PDF